

Want to be a Star Performer?

Hire a Coach

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A coach can help you tap into your potential to achieve your goals and to live a more fulfilling and productive life.

THE JOB OF AN ATHLETIC COACH is to bring out the greatness in athletes in their sport. Similarly, the job of a professional coach is to bring out the personal and professional greatness in individuals and teams in the game of life and work. Star athletes and sports teams have coaches. If you want to excel in your professional and personal life, or if you want stellar performance for your work team, then consider hiring a professional coach.

What is professional coaching?

Professional coaching is relatively new and is still in a state of rapid development as individuals and companies become more aware of its value. Professional coaching ranges from personal coaching, which focuses on life planning, life balance and life issues, to career coaching, which focuses on professional development and achievement of work goals and other career-related objectives.

Professional coaching is a hot trend, and like many trends of the past, there is a tendency to broadly use trendy terminology to describe other, but different, practices that have been in existence for many years. The word “coaching” is used to describe various types of services and processes, such as what has historically been termed “organizational development consulting,” “training,” “career counseling,” “managing,” “mentoring” and “facilitation.”

While no one has a corner on the use of the term “coaching,” its broad use can be very confusing to both coaches and to the general public. Therefore, I want to be clear about the type of coaching this article addresses.

This article covers the brand of coaching as defined by the International Coaching Federation (ICF; www.coachfederation.org):

“Coaching is an on-going relationship which focuses on clients taking action toward the realization of their visions, goals or desires. Coaching uses a process of inquiry and personal discovery to build the client’s level of awareness and responsibility and provides the client with structure, support and feedback. The coaching process helps clients both define and achieve professional and personal goals faster and with more ease than would be possible otherwise.”

This article does not discuss career counseling, consulting (which has an advice orientation) or training in a specific set of skills (such as time management, interview skills, etc.). Also, while many professional coaches work with groups, this article will focus on individual or one-on-one coaching.

Most chemical engineers, like many other professionals, realize that they are capable of living a much more fulfilling and productive life. A coach acts as a catalyst to help a client achieve his or her goals; the client already possesses the potential, the coach just helps lower the energy threshold to achieve the end result.

Coaches are trained to use assessments, as well as listening and language skills, to help their clients unlock their potential. Coaches also assist their clients in seeking the balance, environments and actions that will allow them to achieve self-mastery. Coaching is about tapping into human potential, and as such focuses on what’s working and what’s possible, rather than on what’s wrong and broken, and on the present and future, rather than on the past.

The coaching relationship

In a coaching relationship, the client is the expert in his or her life. As Whitworth *et al.*, put it, “the client is resourceful, creative, and whole” (1).

Coaching is an ongoing process rather than one-time training. Coaches typically have three to four sessions per

month with a client, lasting 30 minutes to an hour. The coaching relationship may last anywhere from several months to several years.

Coaching is customized to deal with the goals and issues facing the client at that moment. This in contrast to traditional training, which typically occurs in the context of hypothetical situations, away from the work environment, and with no follow-up or reinforcement. Coaching takes full advantage of experience-related learning models, because it occurs in the context of the real-life situations that the client is facing.

Coaching is process-oriented. Professional coaching is based on a process of non-judgmental listening, inquiry, feedback and support, which allows the client to grow, learn and achieve results much more quickly.

The coaching process is inquiry-oriented rather than advice-oriented. A coach elicits a client's greatness through listening very carefully and asking questions that will help the client move forward. This is in contrast to a consultant, who often takes a more advice-oriented approach.

According to a survey by the ICF (2), by far, most clients pay their coach to be a sounding board — to really listen and give honest feedback (Table 1). Most clients turn to their coach for help on time management, as well as career guidance and business advice; to a lesser but still significant extent, they seek coaching on relationships, family, wellness and spirituality (Table 2).

The benefits of coaching

Respondents to the ICF survey reported increased self-awareness, setting better goals, a more-balanced life and lower stress levels as the most common outcomes of working with a coach (Table 3).

Increased self-awareness often results from examination of one's emotions, behaviors, values and life purpose. This increased self-awareness provides a strengthened framework for decision-making and action. Self-awareness also is one of the foundational requirements of emotional intelligence (3), and is a strong component of professional effectiveness.

People also may set better goals as a result of working with a coach. Coaches will encourage their clients to orient their goals around their values (*i.e.*, what matters the most to them). Setting better goals and the reinforcement and accountability provided by the coach typically accelerates attainment of the goal.

Issues related to life balance and time management frequently come up during coaching conversations due to how extremely busy most professionals are. Additionally, many coaches believe that professional effectiveness is greatly enhanced by personal fulfillment and self-mastery. For this reason, many coaches employ a holistic approach, even when the goals for the coaching relationship are professional.

Lower stress levels often result from a client's achieving more integrity through better alignment with his or her values, from improved relationships brought about by better self-awareness and self-care, and from improved life-balance.

Table 1. The role of a coach.

Sounding board	84.8%
Motivator	78.1%
Friend	56.7%
Mentor	50.5%
Business consultant	46.7%
Teacher	41.0%
Taskmaster	30.5%
Spiritual guide	29.5%
Other	13.3%

Source: (2).

Table 2. Coaching issues.

Time management	80.5%
Career	74.3%
Business	73.8%
Relationships/Family	58.6%
Physical/Wellness	51.9%
Spiritual	51.0%
Personal	45.2%
Goal-setting	39.5%
Financial	38.1%
Creativity	11.0%
Other	1.4%

Source: (2).

Coaches also help their clients to find simpler ways of accomplishing their objectives, thus leading to lower stress.

Jan Austin, a Master Certified Coach, has coached approximately 400 people with Kodak, many of whom are chemical engineers operating in managerial roles. She says that one of the biggest challenges for many of her clients is balancing their technical expertise with the "people side" of the business. She also points out that the higher an individual progresses in the organization, the more critical interpersonal and leadership skills become (and the less important technical skills are). Jan believes that when chemical engineers (like other technical professionals) become more intentional in developing these interpersonal and leadership skills, they are more successful in meeting that intention. That, she says, is where a coach can help.

Anyone who is ready to develop exponentially can benefit from working with a coach. The best candidates for coaching are people who already enjoy some measure of effectiveness and success in their life, but would like to accomplish more with less struggle.

The coaching process

One of the distinguishing characteristics of coaching is its ongoing nature, and most coaches work with their clients over a minimum of a three-month period. Here is what you can expect if you or your company hire a coach.

- Coaching agreement. You will likely sign an agreement that defines the nature of the relationship, agreements for each party, terms of the coaching, indemnification, etc.

- Client intake. Prior to or during the initial appointment, your coach may ask you to complete a profile, in which you will articulate your coaching goals, long-term goals, strengths, ideal life, etc. If your long-term goals and vision are unclear, then clarification and articulation of your goals may be one of

Table 3. Outcomes of working with a coach.

Self-awareness	67.6%
Setting better goals	62.4%
More-balanced life	60.5%
Lower stress levels	57.1%
Self-discovery	52.9%
Self-confidence	52.4%
Improvement in quality of life	43.3%
Enhanced communication skills	39.5%
Project completion	35.7%
Health or fitness improvement	33.8%
Better relationship with boss or coworkers	33.3%
Better family relationship(s)	33.3%
Increased energy	31.9%
More fun	31.9%
More income	25.7%
Stopped a bad habit	25.7%
Change in career	24.3%
More free time	22.9%
Increased profitability of current business	17.1%
Started a new business	12.9%
Empowered employees	11.0%
Business turn-around	9.0%
Change in residential location	5.7%
Other	15.3%

Source: (2).

your coaching goals. The intake may also ask you to assess your level of satisfaction with different areas of your life.

- **Assessments.** Once your coaching goals are established, the coach supports you in the attainment of your goals. Coaches typically draw from a variety of resources, including coaching and behavioral models and assessments to help deepen your self-awareness. Some of these are validated instruments, such as personality (*e.g.*, Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator), behavioral and values assessments. Others may be checklists or inquiry-based tools to help you assess your own strengths, gaps, deficiencies, lifestyle effectiveness, etc.

- **Length of coaching sessions.** A typical coaching arrangement may involve three to four sessions per month, each ranging from 30 minutes to an hour. Most clients, after working through clarification of goals, find that 30 minutes is sufficient to review progress, discuss current obstacles and receive fieldwork assignments.

- **Costs.** Coaches typically charge corporations anywhere from \$400/mo per individual to as high as \$1,000/mo per individual for executive coaching. Costs for non-corporate individual coaching typically range from \$250/mo to \$500/mo.

- **Virtual delivery.** Many coaches offer their services over the telephone, with support through e-mail. This minimizes geographical barriers and allows more flexibility in choosing a coach, and it eliminates the time that would otherwise be required to travel to your appointment. You can typically call your coach from any location, as well as contact him or her between sessions via phone or e-mail if you have an urgent issue to discuss.

- **Content of coaching sessions.** Your coach may have a structured preparation form for you to complete and e-mail or fax prior to the session. The form may ask you to list your successes since your last session, any current issues you are

dealing with and what you would like to discuss during the allotted time. As the client, you will typically choose what to discuss during the session, though your coach may ask you about your progress on previous commitments, goals, etc.

- **Fieldwork.** Coaching is an action-oriented process, and coaches typically assign fieldwork that the coach and client agree will be mutually beneficial to the client's growth and development. A good coach will give assignments that you can typically incorporate into the course of your daily work and life, rather than creating extra items for your to-do list.

- **Accountability.** Expect your coach to hold you accountable to your goals and commitments, but in a non-judgmental, non-parenting way.

- **Results.** Good coaches expect the best from their clients. If you hire a coach, you are making a personal commitment to your growth, and your coach will hold you to the challenge!

How to find a coach

Most professional coaches are self-employed, although several coaching companies have emerged in recent years. In addition, corporations are increasingly developing an internal coaching culture by either hiring professional coaches as employees or by providing coach training to existing employees.

One resource for finding a coach is the ICF. Established in 1992, the ICF is the mostly widely recognized organization for professional coaches. The ICF, which currently has approximately 4,300 members, has an online database, called the Coach Referral Service, that can be searched for coaches that meet user-specified qualifications. The Coach Referral Service, while useful, only includes those coaches who pay the additional \$150/yr listing fee.

Other resources include the coach training programs, which are described (with links) on the ICF website (www.coachfederation.org). Some of these training organizations, such as Coach U., The Coaches Training Institute, and the Academy for Coach Training, have their own online referral services that typically include their students and graduates.

Finally, many coaches and coaching companies have developed their own websites. Internet search engines will provide links to many of these. Search using keywords such as "personal coach," "professional coach," "business coach" and "career coach."

Call and interview prospective coaches about their training and experience. You can also ask for a complimentary coaching session — many coaches use this to determine if there is a proper fit between the coach and the prospective client, as well as to give the client an idea of the coach's style.

Consider asking your employer to pay for coaching. Professional coaching is often used as both a benefit and a perk to reward high-performing employees. Previously limited primarily to executives, employers are now increasingly using their training budgets to hire coaches for professionals at all levels of the organization. Coaching also cuts out travel costs and time away from the office, which is another reason why it is becoming a popular use of training dollars.

What to look for in a coach

Consider the following factors as you interview coaches:

- **Compatibility.** Would you feel comfortable trusting this person?
- **Integrity.** Do the coach's actions indicate that he or she will honor commitments, maintain confidentiality and treat you with respect?
- **Understanding.** Do you feel understood by the coach?
- **Mutuality.** Will the coach be able to relate to your situation based on similar life or career experiences?
- **Listening skills.** Who did most of the talking? As the client, you should be providing most of the content for the coaching session.
- **Coaching style.** Does the coach provide you with lots of advice or instead help you to discover and have confidence in your own truths? Good coaches will provide the structure for discovery, rather than providing lots of advice.
- **Non-judgmental, but honest feedback.** Unlike the models sometimes used in athletic coaching, good coaches do not yell, and they are never harsh.
- **Training.** Has the coach received training through a reputable school? Even professionals who have been in a similar field, such as leadership or organizational development, will gain a different set of skills as a result of such training.

Literature Cited

1. **Whitworth, L., et al.,** "Co-Active Coaching," Davies-Black Publishing, Palo Alto, CA (1998).
2. **International Coach Federation,** "Analysis of 1998 Survey of Coaching Clients," ICF, available at www.coachfederation.org/press-room/pr-clientsurvey.htm (1998).
3. **Marshall, C.,** "Make the Most of Your Emotional Intelligence," *Chem. Eng. Progress*, **97** (2), pp. 92–95 (Feb. 2001).

Further Reading

Berman-Fortgang, L., "Take Yourself to the Top: The Secrets of America's No. 1 Career Coach," Warner Books, Inc., New York, NY (1998).

Websites of Interest

- www.coachfederation.org** — The International Coach Federation. The ICF has a coach referral service. This website also includes information on and links to coach training organizations, many of which have their own coach referral service.
- www.coachu.com** — Coach U., one of the largest coach training programs; includes a coach referral service.
- www.thecoaches.com** — The Coaches Training Institute, a large coach training program; includes a coach referral service.
- www.coachtraining.com** — The Academy for Coach Training; includes a coach referral service.
- www.iacmp.com** — The International Association of Career Management Professional (IACMP); this organization is geared more toward consultancy-based career management professionals, such as job search, outplacement, and resumé writing consultants.

- **Coaching focus.** Coaches often focus on working with certain types of individuals or topical specialties (such as life, career, business, etc.).

- **Experience.** How much and what type of coaching experience has the coach had?

- **Certification.** Consider whether or not the coach is certified. The ICF has established a credentialing program to certify coaches, as well as a code of ethics and standards for the profession. To receive the Professional Certified Coach (PCC) or Master Certified Coach (MCC) designation, one must have at least 750 or 2,500 hours of coaching experience, respectively. As of January 2002, only 703 coaches (or approximately 16% of the ICF membership) were certified by the ICF (393 PCC and 310 MCC). Some of the individual coach training schools have also developed certification processes.

The bottom line is this: when working with a coach, ideally you should feel that your vision, purpose and level of fulfillment have been expanded and enhanced. If this is not happening for you, you should find another coach.

Working effectively with a coach

Finally, here are some pointers on how to work most effectively with a coach.

- Be prepared to experience rapid interpersonal and professional development.
- Be willing to invest the time and energy to achieve it.
- Be open to considering new perspectives.
- Experiment with new ways of behaving; treat your life and career as a laboratory for learning.
- Keep your scheduled appointments with your coach.
- Work on the fieldwork assignments between coaching sessions.
- Be prepared for honest, but non-judgmental feedback, as your coach will often be direct with you.
- Prepare for the coaching sessions in advance, and know what you would like to discuss.
- Be open with your coach; tell the full truth of the situations you are experiencing.
- Tell your coach right away if you are not getting what you want or expect from the coaching relationship. **CEP**

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